The Army has collected numerous lessons learned over nine years of persistent conflict that are shaping the Army’s transformation efforts and its leader and soldier development. The global war on terrorism has demonstrated that the Army must continuously assess and adapt its capabilities in order to successfully operate in challenging and diverse environments, defeat ever-adapting threat forces, and effectively partner with various joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational (JIIM) organizations. We can no longer accept transformation efforts that take years or decades. Today’s and tomorrow’s agile and adaptive threat
forces continuously change capabilities as quickly as we change our own—in some cases, more quickly.

Given these challenging dynamics, the Army has altered its conceptual framework to keep transformation efforts on pace. The 2009 Army Capstone Concept (ACC) and 2010 Army Operating Concept (AOC) form the foundation of a new conceptual framework to address rapidly evolving operational environments, adaptive threats, and the ambiguity, complexity, uncertainty, and risks that confront soldiers and units now and into the future. The new framework moves beyond the “counterinsurgency versus major combat operations” debate. It focuses on our ability not only to conduct combined arms maneuver and wide-area security within the context of full spectrum operations, but also to be prepared to execute some or all of these missions simultaneously as an Army and joint force—as demonstrated over the last year with Operation New Dawn, Operation Enduring Freedom, relief efforts in Haiti, and our chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosives (CBRNE) consequence management response force missions.

As the Army continues to adapt to meet these demands as defined in the ACC and the AOC, the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence (MSCoE) supports Army conceptual efforts through its continuous evaluation, adaptation and evolution of the Army functional concept (AFC) for protection, the newest of the warfighting functions. Movement and maneuver, intelligence, mission command, fires, and sustainment are the other warfighting functions. The 2010 protection concept evolved from conceptual roots that formed the doctrinal foundation of Field Manual 3-37 Protection. The original concept and doctrinal framework focused the Army’s protection requirements on the soldier and the unit, such as hardening vehicles, improving body armor and executing doctrinal protection tasks.

The revised protection concept expands upon this defensive, and sometimes reactive, approach to focus on both offensive and defensive proactive measures. It proposes four essential components for effective force protection:

- Identifying, preventing and mitigating threats to personnel and vital assets.
- Simultaneously synchronizing and integrating multiple, mutually supporting protection-related tasks at multiple locations.
- Making available JIIM organizations to execute a wide variety of protection missions.
- Educating and developing future soldiers and leaders to conduct protection-related functions during decentralized operations and in uncertain environments.

In addition, the revised protection concept emphasizes the importance of planning for and expanding our protection priorities to include protecting joint, coalition and host-nation partners; civilian populations; equipment; resources; infrastructure; and cultural landmarks during full spectrum operations. It calls for a more holistic approach that focuses on adapting our force to better leverage, integrate and synchronize JIIM capabilities and better understand complex operational environments. It emphasizes the need for soldiers, leaders and organizations to identify, prevent and mitigate a wide variety of threats whose intentions, relationships, and tactics are often complex and ever evolving. It emphasizes the importance of mutually supporting and overlapping protection through all operational and tactical level actions. It better positions our forces to defend and recover from threat effects and to counterattack, neutralize and defeat the threats themselves.

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The protection concept provides the foundation for future force development pertaining to the protection warfighting function. The capabilities-based assessment process ensures that capabilities development is synchronized across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) domains, nested within joint efforts, and adequately addresses our force’s future protection requirements. Its holistic approach supports future forces in conducting the full range of military operations, from full spectrum operations to garrison installation protection, through preserving combat power, preserving the commander’s freedom of maneuver, protecting civilian populations, and leveraging joint, coalition and host-nation protection activities.

To ensure the protection concept evolves to meet Army needs, MSCoE has nested its capabilities-based assessment of the concept within the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command’s (TRADOC) two-year conceptual framework revision cycle. As highlighted in LTG Michael A. Vane’s article “Charting the Army’s Direction” (ARMY Magazine November 2010), TRADOC has shifted from a five-year to a two-year cycle to ensure concepts are relevant and meet Army needs in a complex and rapidly changing world.

Continuous integration of operational lessons learned (along with emerging insights from experiments and exercises) is critical to keep the protection concept updated, relevant and focused on developing the right capabilities for the force.

Through its protection capabilities-based assessment, MSCoE ensures that emerging protection capabilities are nested within its other proponent responsibilities to keep emerging solutions relevant, synchronized and integrated with other initiatives and programs. This reduces redundancy, assures efficient use of resources, and ensures that developing capabilities are versatile and adaptive to meet multiple requirements. One MSCoE goal is to develop protection capabilities that can support both full spectrum operations and garrison installation protection operations, thus eliminating single-purpose systems and programs, excessive training and qualification requirements, and duplicate expenditures.

TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-5, The U.S. Army Functional Concept for Protection 2016–2028, represents a significant advance in the Army’s ability to synchronize force modernization efforts in developing protection capabilities across DOTMLPF. It ensures that protection capabilities are synchronized with the other functional concepts and across the Army and joint services. The evolution from the original concept (which emphasized defensive and reactive measures) to a proactive, integrated and synchronized approach for identifying, preventing and mitigating future threats provides the Army with effective protection capabilities for the future. Together with the ACC, the AOC and the other AFCs, the protection concept ensures we are continuously assessing and improving the required capabilities to achieve continued Army dominance and success in future conflicts.